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MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

BOSTON

EGYPTIAN ART

Predynastic Room

III

EGYPTIAN ART

Predynastic Room

Department of Egyptian Art
Gallery Guide no. 3

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CHRONOLOGY

redynastic:
00 B.C. ± 500 yrs. to 3700 B.C. ± 300 yrs.
e transition from the late stone age to the
ractical use of hardened copper.

Early Predynastic Period
5000 B.C. ± 500 yrs. to 4400 B.C. ± 400 yrs.
Late neolithic period.

Middle Predynastic Period
4400 B.C. ± 400 yrs. to 3900 B. C. ± 300 yrs.
Use of copper weapons.

Late Predynastic Period
3900 B.C. ± 300 yrs. to 3700 B.C. ± 300 yrs.
Use of copper implements (period of political coalescence)

arly Dynastic:
700 B.C. ± 300 yrs. to 3150 B.C. ± 300 yrs.
rchaic period: political unification of Egypt:
rude-brick architecture: period of stone ves-
els: beginnings of sculpture, painting, and all
rts and crafts.

First Dynasty
3700 B.C. ± 300 yrs. to 3450 B.C. ± 300 yrs.

Second Dynasty
3450 B.C. ± 300 yrs. to 3150 B.C. ± 300 yrs.

ld Kingdom:
150 B.C. ± 300 yrs. to 2600 B.C. ± 200 yrs.

Third Dynasty
3150 B.C. ± 300 yrs. to 3050 B.C. ± 200 yrs.
Crude-brick architecture translated into lime-
stone: the potter's wheel in use: beginnings of
great development of sculpture in the round in
limestone and in hard stone.

Fourth Dynasty
3050 B.C. ± 200 yrs. to 2900 B.C. ± 200 yrs.
Limestone architecture translated into granite:
culmination of sculpture in the round: develop-
ment of sculpture in relief.

Fifth Dynasty
2900 B.C. ± 200 yrs. to 2750 B.C. ± 200 yrs.
Spread of sculptural arts: culmination of arch-
itecture: extension of use of walls with reliefs.

Sixth Dynasty
2750 B.C. ± 200 yrs. to 2600 B.C. ± 200 yrs.
Equalization of wealth: widest extension of use
of sculpture: beginning of dissolution of abso-
lute monarchy.

EGYPTIAN ART

Predynastic Room

(Egyptian Study Series I)

The objects in this room date from the Pre-
astic and Early Dynastic Periods (ca. 5000 B.C.
3150 B.C.). The collection includes weapons,
nsils, articles of personal adornment, etc.,
greater part of which had been placed in the
ves and tomb chambers for the use of the spirit
the next world, -- for the Egyptian, even at
s early period, believed in a life hereafter
ject to all the requirements of the same nature
those of the present life. The tomb of the
dynastic Period is usually a shallow rectangu-
or oval pit, in which the body lies on its
e in a contracted posture. Often the body is
pped in a skin or woven fabric, but no trace
embalmment has been found. Beneath the body is
en a mat of plaited rushes; in the hand is the
te palette for grinding the face paint, the
en malachite for which lies near in a small bag;
the body are articles of adornment (necklaces,
celets, hairpins, etc.), and around it are ves-
s of pottery or stone containing the remains of
d, drink, and ointment for the use of the
rit in the hereafter. Weapons of flint, and
e, ivory, or copper tipped harpoons, were also
ced in the grave, that the spirit of the de-
sed might replenish his larder from the chase.

Pottery

The pottery found in the graves of the Pre-
astic Period is plentiful and varied. It is
hand-made (the potter's wheel was not intro-
ed till the Third Dynasty), and gives proof,
n at the dawn of Egyptian culture, of that
ll in craftsmanship which we admire in the
ks of art of the Historic Age.

Case I

The three shelves nearest the window contain
sels of a brown clay, colored black inside and
und the mouth, and red outside. They were
ished by rubbing with a pebble. This ware,
wn as Black Topped Ware, was in use throughout
Predynastic Period, but is especially plenti-
in the early part of that period. Closely
ied to the Black Topped Ware, indeed identical
naterial and often in form, is the Red Polished

Ware shown on the two upper shelves to the right, and characteristic of the Early Predynastic Period. Note the two flasks, one red and one black, both found in the same grave, and identical in form and material. This instance connects the Red Polished Ware with a small class of black polished vessels, of which a few examples are shown in the adjoining case. Below, and in the adjoining Case 2, are vessels of this same red polished ware decorated with painting in yellowish-white lines. This is known as White Line Decorated Ware, and is also of the Early Predynastic Period (see Case 2, below).

Nos. 1, 3-8 were found in the Pyramid Temple of King Mycerinus of the Fourth Dynasty (ca. 3000 B.C.), but are themselves much older. The other vessels in the case are from graves of the Predynastic Period.

No. 2. Note the figure of a crocodile with open mouth scratched on the side of the vase.

No. 9. Bowl representing a bird.

Case 2

The middle shelf on the left contains a few examples of Black Polished Ware, closely allied to the Red Polished and Black Topped Wares seen in Case 1. Next to these is a group of three cups which form a link between the Black Topped Ware and the White Line Decorated Ware seen on the shelves above and below, and on the bottom shelf of Case 1. Next to the right on the middle shelf is a small group illustrative of a rare class of pottery known as Black Incised Ware. This ware is of a black or very dark color, and is decorated with dots punched in the clay while yet soft, and then filled with white coloring matter. Both in form and decoration these vessels are very suggestive of basketwork, and to bring this resemblance out, a predynastic basket has been placed next to them.

On the upper and lower shelves to the left are shown examples of White Line Decorated Ware, of which further specimens are seen at the bottom of the adjoining Case 1. Many of these are of forms reminiscent of basketwork, and the same influence may be observed in some of the decoration. Others are ornamented with conventional plant or animal forms.

The section on the right contains pottery of a light drab ware decorated with painting in brick

red. This is known as Red Line Decorated Ware, and is characteristic of the Middle Predynastic Period. The material is harder and more durable than those previously in use. We may also observe the influence of the more costly stone vessels on the cheaper material. Compare the form of the squat-bodies jars with that of the very fine marble vase shown on the pedestal near the window.

Nos. 1-4 were found in the Pyramid Temple of King Mycerinus of the Fourth Dynasty (ca. 3000 B.C.) at Giza, but are themselves much older. These, and other still older vessels found in this temple, seem to have been treasured as antiques for a thousand years or more.

No. 1. The painting on this vase is intended to imitate the appearance of red Assuan granite.

Case 3

The two middle shelves contain further examples of the Red Line Decorated Ware already seen in Case 2. Again, the forms are strongly imitative of stone vases, as may be seen by comparison with the table case of predynastic stone vessels opposite. Note especially the paintings representing boats on some of these vases. Amid-ships are two cabins, while at the stern is the branch of a palm or other tree to shade the helmsman. The mast bears an emblem representing the district from which the boat hails.

On the top shelf are tall cylinder jars of the Early Dynastic Period. The red lines represent the string nets in which such jars were hung and carried.

The bottom shelf contains coarse pottery of inferior quality dating from the Late Predynastic Period.

Nos. 1-3 were found in the Pyramid Temple of King Mycerinus at Giza.

No. 1. Imitation Assuan granite.

No. 2. Fragmentary double vase.

No. 4. Decorated with a row of ostriches.

Stone Vessels

During the Predynastic Period stone vessels were laboriously made by hand and were very rare.

From the beginning of the First Dynasty they became plentiful, and to a large extent took the place of pottery in the tombs of the rich. This development was due to the greater ease of manufacture made possible by the invention of the copper tube-drill and the weighted stone-borer, with which tools the hardest stones could be worked with comparative ease. Just as the adoption of new tools for the manufacture of stone vessels caused a decline in the use of pottery, so, when the potter's wheel was invented in the Third Dynasty, making possible a great improvement in the quality of the product, pottery again rose in favor, and drove stone out of general use. It was, however, retained throughout the Old Kingdom, and indeed to some extent during the whole length of Egyptian history, for religious and ceremonial purposes.

Case 7

This case contains hand-made stone vessels of the Predynastic Period, which are rare. Some of the stones used are very hard, especially the black basalt, and we cannot fail to admire the skill which produced perfect symmetry out of such refractory materials.

Most of these vessels were found by the Harvard University-Museum of Fine Arts Egyptian Expedition in graves of the Predynastic Period at Mesa'eed. The tall alabaster vase was found in the Valley Temple of King Mycerinus of the Fourth Dynasty at Giza, but is itself much older than this temple.

At either end of the case are two mace-heads of stone. These, mounted on wooden handles, were used as weapons. The flat disc form is confined to the Predynastic Period; the bulbous form continues in use in later ages as a ceremonial emblem of power and authority.

Case 4

This case contains stone vessels of the First and Second Dynasties; the Early Dynastic Period. The following are of special interest:

No. 1. Alabaster cylinder jar from the tomb at Abydos of King Zer of the First Dynasty. Compare the form with those of the pottery jars at the top of the adjoining Case 3. The rope carved below the rim is an ornamental survival, representing either the upper border of the

string net, or the string with which a piece of cloth or leather was tied over the mouth of the vase.

No. 2. Slate cylinder jar from the tomb at Abydos of King Den of the First Dynasty. The rope is again represented below the rim, and there are two scratched signs on the vase, possibly intended for hieroglyphs.

No. 3. Alabaster bowl from Hierakonpolis. Two hieroglyphs colored blue near the rim give the name of an Early Dynastic king called the "Scorpion."

No. 4. Alabaster bowl with a crudely scratched and illegible Horus name. The "Horus name" is that which was borne by the king as the representative of Horus, the great god of heaven, whose symbol was a hawk.

No. 5. Fragment of a pink quartz bowl decorated with an incised representation of the bark of the god Sokaris, on the prow of which is an ostrich; above the boat is a group of hieroglyphic signs. This dates from the First Dynasty and was found at Abydos.

No. 6. Shallow diorite bowl from the tomb at Abydos of King Khasekemuwy of the Second Dynasty. It is in perfect preservation and an unusually fine specimen.

Three further stone vessels of the Early Dynastic Period may here be noticed. 1st: The fine large marble vase on the pedestal near the windows. 2nd: The small limestone vase from the tomb of King Khasekemuwy, seen at the top of Case 8 in the centre of this room. The gold leaf tied over the top of this vase with a golden cord shows us the manner in which these vessels were closed, normally with cloth or leather. 3rd: The tall alabaster jar in the centre of Case 11.

Case 5

These are stone vessels of the Third Dynasty. Of special interest are the two limestone plates, Nos. 1 and 2, which are inscribed with the Horus name of Kha-ba. The diorite bowl No. 3 was found in the Valley Temple of King Mycerinus of the Fourth Dynasty.

Case 6

Ceremonial stone vessels from the Valley Temple at Giza of King Mycerinus of the Fourth Dynasty. This small selection from the great mass of stone vases found in the funerary temples of this king, gives some idea of the great variety of forms and materials in use.

No. 1. Thin diorite bowl with a spout for pouring.

Nos. 2 and 3 are from El Kab, but of the same date.

Case 7 (see page 4)

Case 8

Slate Palettes and Amulets

In this case are shown a number of the palettes, made of slate, on which the ancient Egyptians ground up the malachite which they mixed with some fatty substance to form the green paint with which they drew a broad circle around their eyes, and also painted their eyelids; this decoration, besides being considered ornamental, also served the utilitarian purpose of protecting the eyes somewhat from the glare of the sun on the sand. The palettes were fashioned in the form of birds, animals, and fish. The eyes are usually bits of inlaid shell. Most of them are pierced with a hole for suspension, in order that they might be carried on the body, probably suspended around the neck. Some were also used as amulets, objects worn to protect the wearer, either living or dead, from the attacks of visible or invisible foes. In later times these palettes developed into elaborately decorated votive offerings -- for instance, the very large palette of King Nar-Mer (First Dynasty), of which a cast may be seen in this room.

Mace-Heads

Examples are shown of the two principal classes of mace-heads, used as weapons by the early Egyptians. The oldest, which date from the Predynastic Period, are those in the shape of a disc, usually made of syenite or porphyry. Their form is perfect, which is amazing when one considers that they were made of the hardest kinds of stone and without the aid of metal tools. The bulbous or pear-shaped mace-heads appear throughout the history of Egypt, from

the beginning of the Fourth Dynasty, as an emblem of might in the hand of the king. A good illustration of this type may be seen in the ceremonial palette of King Nar-Mer, a cast of which is in this room. They were made of many kinds of stone, i.e., basalt, haematite, breccia, alabaster, slate, and limestone. The handles of both types were usually of wood, though specimens have been discovered with handles of ivory and horn. Like the slate palettes, these objects later developed into large decorated votive offerings. Four more mace-heads are shown in Case 7.

Flint Implements

On the two sides of this case, and on the end of Case 9 adjoining, is shown an interesting series of flints. These include knives, spear-heads, arrow-heads, and scrapers. They date from the Early Predynastic, or Neolithic, Period (i.e., 5000 B.C. and earlier), before the ancient Egyptians had any knowledge of the use of metal. But, nevertheless, it is doubtful if any other country in the world has carried the working of flint to such perfection. Note with what symmetrical precision the flakes have been struck off from the knives shown here. Note also the finely serrated cutting edges. Such knives as these had handles of gold, ivory, leather, and wood; a fragment of a wooden handle still adheres to one of the knives shown here. Even after the discovery of metal, flint knives continued to be used by the priests of Egypt in the performance of various religious ceremonies, but these later knives never attained the degree of perfection shown in the early specimens (see the four examples of the Fourth and Fifth Dynasties shown on the side of this case away from the windows).

Case 9

(For the flint knives and arrow-heads, see Case 8 above.)

From the earliest times the Egyptians, both men and women, were fond of decorating themselves with ornaments of various kinds, necklaces, bracelets, hairpins, etc., of which a very representative collection of the early types is shown here. Many of the ornaments were worn as amulets to protect the wearer, either living or dead, from the attacks of visible or invisible foes. They date from the Early Predynastic Period to the Second or Third Dynasty.

1. Fragment of a gray marble vase, inscribed with the name of King Qa, who reigned during the First Dynasty. Found in his tomb at Abydos.

2. Fragments of a dish of dolomite marble, cut in imitation of basketwork. Found in the tomb of King Khasekemuwy at Abydos. Second Dynasty.

3. Fragment of a sandstone bowl, with incised figure of a dwarf. Found in the tomb of King Zer at Abydos. First Dynasty.

4. Fragment of a marble dish, inscribed with the name of King Qa. From his tomb at Abydos. First Dynasty.

5. Fragment of a dolomite marble dish with a delicate pattern in relief. From the tomb of King Zet at Abydos. First Dynasty.

6. Sceptre of King Khasekemuwy (probably to be identified with Manetho's Boethos of the King Lists; the first king of the Second Dynasty). Composed of cylindrical sard beads on a copper rod bound at intervals with gold bands. Found in the tomb of King Khasekemuwy at Abydos.

7-8. Small bull's legs of ivory. Probably legs of a toilet box. From the tomb of King Zet at Abydos. First Dynasty.

9. Bull's leg of ivory from a casket. Found in the tomb of King Zer at Abydos. First Dynasty.

10. Fragments of an ivory column. Found in the tomb of King Khasekemuwy at Abydos. Second Dynasty.

11. Small ivory panel with incised figure of a tributary. From the tomb of King Menes at Abydos. First Dynasty.

12. Fragment of ivory cup. Inscribed with name of King Zer. From his tomb at Abydos. First Dynasty.

13. Fragment of ivory strip with incised decoration. Found in the tomb of King Zer. First Dynasty.

14. Small ivory hand. From the tomb of King Zer. First Dynasty.

15. Small figure of a girl. Ivory. From the tomb of King Benerab at Abydos.

16. Lower part of figure of a lioness. Ivory. Found in the tomb of King Zer at Abydos. First Dynasty.

17. Small ivory figure of a man. From Abydos Temple. First Dynasty.

18. Ivory. Found at Mesa'eed. Predynastic Period.

19-20. Two ivory staff-ends (?) carved in the form of hippopotami. Predynastic Period.

21-22. Two ivory figures of hippopotami. Found at Mesa'eed. Predynastic Period.

23. Ivory sceptre (?). Found at Zawiet-el-Aryan. First Dynasty.

24-25. Two ivory amulets or pendants (?). Decorated with incised spiral grooves colored black; incised groove around top. From Mesa'eed. Predynastic Period.

26-27. Two amulets of carved ivory, made to be worn suspended upside down, probably so that the wearer could better look at them. From Sheikh Ali. Predynastic Period.

28-29. Fragments of ivory bracelets with engraved decoration. From the tomb of King Zer at Abydos. First Dynasty.

30-36. Seven ivory bracelets for children, two with incised decoration. From Zawiet-el-Aryan. Early Dynasty Period.

37. Ivory bracelet. From Zawiet-el-Aryan. Second Dynasty.

38-43. Six bracelets cut from shells. Predynastic Period.

44-45. Two bracelets of polished flint. Predynastic Period.

46. Bracelet of green slate. Found at Zawiet-el-Aryan. Second Dynasty.

47. Slate bracelet. From Naga-el-Hai. Predynastic Period.

48. Model comb, made of steatite. From Sheikh Ali. Predynastic Period.

49. Model comb of ivory. Found at Naga-el-Hai. Predynastic Period.

50. Ivory comb (broken). From Mesa'eed. Predynastic Period.

51. Ivory comb with figure of a gazelle on top. Found at Naga-el-Hai. Predynastic Period.

52. Ivory hairpin. From Mesa'eed. Predynastic Period.

53. Ivory hair ornament, human head with inlaid eyes of shell. Found at Naga-el-Hai. Predynastic Period.

54. Ivory hairpin. From Mesheikh. Predynastic Period.

55-56. Two ivory hairpins, one decorated with head of a gazelle and one with serpent. From Zawiet-el-Aryan. Second Dynasty.

57. Ivory hairpin with serpent on top. Found at Mesa'eed. Predynastic Period.

58-74. Seventeen necklaces of various kinds of stones (carnelian, amethyst, quartz, alabaster, etc.), glazed faience, shells, and ivory. From Mesa'eed, Zawiet-el-Aryan, and Mesheikh. Predynastic and Early Dynastic Periods.

75. Amulet in shape of a pig (?). Made of carnelian. Found at Mesa'eed. Predynastic Period.

76. Amulet, conventional bull's head. Ivory. Found at Zawiet-el-Aryan. Second Dynasty.

77. Pendant or amulet of gypsum. Found at Sheikh Farag. Predynastic Period.

78. Small pottery figure of a cow; probably a votive offering. Found at Mesheikh.

Predynastic Period.

79-80. Two interesting figures (dolls?) with heads shaped like bird's heads. They are made of unbaked mud from the Nile Valley and are painted red and brown. Predynastic Period.

81-83. Three fish-harpoons of ivory. Contemporary with the flint implements. From Mesa'eed. Predynastic Period.

84-85. Two copper fish-harpoons. Found at Mesa'eed. Late Predynastic Period.

86-87. Two copper fish-spears. Found at Zawiet-el-Aryan. Second Dynasty.

88-90. Three copper needles. From Mesa'eed. Late Predynastic Period.

91. Copper awl. From Mesa'eed. Late Predynastic Period.

Unfinished Statuettes

Case 10

The Valley Temple at Giza of King Mycerinus of the Fourth Dynasty was unfinished at the death of that king, and it was hastily completed in mud-brick by his successor. A considerable number of statues, statuettes, and other objects were in process of manufacture for this temple at the king's death, and were never finished. Thus, the excavation of the Valley Temple yielded an extremely interesting and important group of statues and statuettes in various stages of completion and in different materials. The great Slate Pair Statue of Mycerinus and his Queen, exhibited in the First Egyptian Gallery upstairs, is one of these. The group shown in this case is a selection from the unfinished statuettes, intended to illustrate the methods of manufacture. Beginning at the window on the right, and going around the case, there are five figures of diorite, followed by two smaller ones of a reddish limestone. All are portraits of King Mycerinus. The five diorite statuettes are labelled to indicate the progressive stages of the work. The method used for hard stones, such as granite and diorite, was probably to bruise the surface by hammering, thus pulverising the small crystals of which the stone is composed. Cutting would not be possible, and sawing would only be used to obtain a block of

the approximate dimensions required, and possibly for the first roughing out of the main planes, as in the first stage of our group. As each step was completed, the master sculptor drew guiding lines in red paint upon the stone, indicating the parts to be removed by the apprentices, who doubtless did the actual work in the preliminary stages. In the second, third, and fourth figures we see the statuette gradually taking shape. Probably at the fourth stage the master himself would take on the work, for from this point on a false stroke might easily ruin the figure. The fifth stage shows the statuette ready for surfacing. From here on the work would consist in the modelling of the finer details, largely by rubbing, and then in the final polishing. The two small figures show one stage of the work in the relatively soft limestone, where the method of cutting and shaving was used instead of the bruising necessary in the harder material.

Model Vessels

Case 11

In this case is shown a representative group of models in alabaster, dating from the Old Kingdom. In previous ages it was customary to bury with the dead actual vessels containing real offerings of food and drink (one of these is shown in the centre of this case). In the Old Kingdom the practice arose of substituting models or dummies for the real object. The advantages of such a practice are obvious. First, useful articles would not be withdrawn from everyday use by the living, and, secondly, the expense of making large vessels especially for the dead would be saved. To the mind of the ancient Egyptian, a model would be just as useful in the next world as the real object, for the spirit which resides in all things, animate and inanimate, is what counts in the hereafter, and the spirit of a jar of beer may reside in a model of that jar just as truly as in a real one. It might be argued that real vessels of pottery would be as cheap to provide as models of stone, but it is to be noted that stone was the coveted material, used by the rich, and a model in stone is much more to be desired than a real vessel of mere pottery.

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